Choosing Childcare

Choosing an appropriate childcare environment for your child can be overwhelming, to say the least! Parents want to be sure that they choose an environment that is nurturing, educational, and fun! They also want to be able to trust that the caregivers are keeping their child safe and happy throughout the long day that they have to be separated from them. Our children are our most valuable assets. Each one is unique in his/her own way and deserves the best that we can give them. No pressure! There are so many things to consider beyond the cost, hours, location and reputation that this is not an easy task or decision. Parents must do their homework! But you are not alone…. about 70% of parents place their young children in some type of daily care.

What's Inside…

♦ Types of Programs
♦ Who to call
♦ Questions, Questions, Questions……
♦ Children with Special Needs
♦ Resources

This is the first of a two-part series of bulletins in which ECDC will review different care and educational options for young children. Our next bulletin will review Preschools vs. Nursery Schools.

While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about.

An Overview: Programs You Can Choose From

Listed below are brief descriptions of common types of childcare programs in New York State. Each program is regulated by the state Office of Children and Family Services, except New York City-based day care centers, which are regulated by the New York City Department of Health.

Day Care Centers - provide care for more than six children at a time, not in a personal residence.

Small Day Care Centers - provide care for up to six children, not in a personal residence.

Family Day Care Homes - provide care for three to six children at a time in a residence; may add one or two school-age children. The maximum allowable number of children will depend on whether there are and how many infants are in care.

Group Family Day Care Homes - provide care for seven to twelve children at a time in a residence; may add one or two school-age children. The maximum allowable number of children will depend on whether there are and how many infants are in care. A provider must use an assistant when more than six children are present.

*Each of the programs listed above can serve children ages six weeks through twelve years and operate for more than three hours a day.

School-Age Child Care Programs - provide care for more than six children from kindergarten through age twelve. Care for children during non-school hours; also may provide care during school vacation periods and holidays. Other forms of legal child care include:

Nursery Schools - provide care for three hours a day or less. In New York City, the City Department of Health regulates these programs. A nursery school may voluntarily register with the State Education Department (SED).

Pre-Kindergartens - usually located in public schools, but can also be found in private schools or day care centers; supervised by the SED.

Head Start Centers - targeted for preschool-age children from low income families; federally funded and usually licensed as Day Care Centers.

Legally Exempt Care (Informal) - provide care for one to two children at a time in addition to the provider's children, usually in the provider's home; are not required to register.

SOURCE: http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/childcare/brochure.asp

Where to start?

Who do you call in your County?
Your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency (CCR&R)

CAYUGA & ONONDAGA
Child Care Solutions, Inc.
Phone: (315) 446-1220 x 303
Email: CCS@childcaresolutionscny.org
Website: www.childcaresyracuse.org

OSWEGO
Integrated Community Planning Council
of Oswego County, Inc.
Phone: (315) 343-2344
Email: cwilson@cnymail.com

CORTLAND
The Cortland Area Child Care Council, Inc.
Phone: (607) 753- 0106
Email: Anne@cortlandchildcare.org
Website: www.cortlandchildcare.org

SENECA
Child & Family Resources, Inc.
Phone: (315) 568-0945
Email: julie.mccoy@cfresources.org
Website: www.cfresources.org

TOMPKINS
Child Development Council
Phone: (607) 273-0259
Email: sue@childdevelopmentcouncil.org
Website: www.childdevelopmentcouncil.org

How do you even begin to consider programs?

⇒ Start early to locate options of interest and convenience to your home and work: call your local CCR&R and review their listings; review OCFS lists (all state licensed programs which also offers information about violations); talk too friends, family, and co-workers.

⇒ Review individual childcare program websites.

⇒ Call several programs/providers and ask initial questions:
- Do you have openings for my child's age group?
- What are the fees for full-time/part-time care?
- What are the hours of care?

⇒ Make an appointment too visit the center, to tour the classrooms, meet with the director and ask more specific questions about staffing, curriculum, routines, and schedules.

⇒ Visit more than one center. Compare the benefits of each center.

⇒ Choose a program based on your preference, availability, location, hours, accreditation, and references from family and friends.

⇒ Stay involved. You and your child's caregiver are partners now! Participate in parent-caregiver meetings, volunteer, join in special events, and visit your child in his classroom.

Additional Questions to Consider:
When selecting an appropriate childcare setting/provider for your children, parents need to consider many issues in addition to quality, affordability, and availability. Remember no question is too small! And no possible list of questions is complete……

- How many children are there for each adult? The younger the child, the more important.
- How many children are in each group? Think about how busy a room would be with 20 toddlers vs. 10 toddlers.
- What training and education do the caregivers have? Are they involved in activities to improve their skills, such as classes and workshops?
- How long have the caregivers been at the center or providing care in their home? Caregivers who come and go a lot make it hard on your child and family.
- Has the childcare been accredited by a national or state organization? Accreditation means that providers have met standards above the general state licensing requirements, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or NY Quality Stars.
- What is the provider's policy on discipline and behavior? What supports are available to the staff and children?
- Is at least one caregiver certified in CPR, medication administration and first aid?
- Are parents allowed to visit at any time? Parents who are free to come and go in their child's classroom develop more comfort and trust in the caregivers.
- Is there a fenced outdoor play area with safe and age-appropriate equipment?

The Questions Continue….

From the initial visit, to the first time you drop off, until the first day of kindergarten.

* Do the caregivers appear to like children?

* Do they get down and speak to children on their level?

* Is the environment clean, especially the eating, diapering and toileting areas?

* Are there enough materials and toys for the number of children? Are they appropriate for the age group?

* Is the environment arranged to allow easy movement of children and adults throughout the room? Is there room for active play/space for infants to crawl?

* Are children and adults washing their hands upon entry to the room, at mealtimes, and diapering/toileting times?

* Is there a daily schedule that is clear and consistently followed? Is this posted and visible?

* How do caregivers communicate with parents about their child's day? Notes, daily journals, greetings at pick up, etc.

* Are the children's needs met quickly even when it is busy?

* Do you agree with the discipline practices observed?
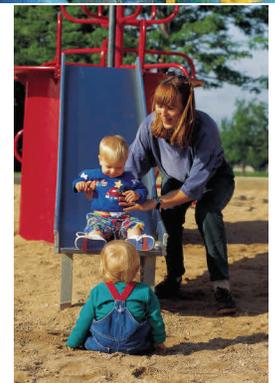
Things to look for when you visit…

⇒ A variety of developmentally appropriate toys and materials are available
⇒ Classroom staff greet children and adults who enter the room
⇒ Children seem happy and content and are engaged in exploring their environment
⇒ The room is arranged such that the children can easily move around the classroom
⇒ Learning centers have clear boundaries and have enough variety to interest the children
⇒ Classroom schedules and rules are posted, with photos or pictures for younger children
⇒ Adults use directions that are short, simple and specific
⇒ Teacher-directed activities, such as circle, art, etc., are short and engaging for all children; not lasting more than 10-15 minutes depending on the age range
⇒ Adults recognize and comment on positive behavior
⇒ Adults redirect children engaging in challenging behavior to more appropriate behaviors
⇒ Adults interact socially with children during mealtimes, diapering and other caregiving routines
⇒ Communication to the family comes periodically from the program or teacher (newsletters, open house, parent conferences, family events, etc.)
⇒ Classrooms display materials or activities to honor the different cultural/linguistic backgrounds of families and children in the program

SOURCE: Hemmeter, et.al. TPOT & TPITOS; 2009

When Your Child has Special Needs….

What families want for their children **with** identified special needs are the same things that families want for their children **without** special needs!

- Get recommendations from friends, pediatricians, therapists, etc.
- Select childcare that includes children who have special needs and those who are typically developing
- Check the center for accessibility issues. It is important for your child to be independent and experience and enjoy the bulk of the center's activities, even if he has mobility limitations.
- Ask staff about training and experience with children similar to your child.
- Quiz the staff on potential emergencies and how they would be handled.
- Be up front about what your child can and cannot do. You are the expert on your child! The childcare providers can only benefit from what you know.

What are the Benefits of Inclusion?

Inclusion benefits everyone, from children to parents and staff.

- **For children who have special needs,** they become part of their community, peers serve as role models and they learn skills within natural settings.
- **For children without disabilities,** they learn acceptance of differences, diversity of friendships, and become more resourceful and creative.
- **For parents,** they become aware of disabilities, increase their knowledge of typical development, locate other parents for support and information.
- **For early childhood providers,** they receive hands-on-training, learn to work as a team, have a wealth of support and materials, and gain more understanding of child development.
- **For special education providers,** they work with diverse staff, and diverse groups of children, learn skills from other staff, and move toward a whole developmental perspective.

Looking for more copies of this bulletin? You can find it on our ECDC website or contact us.

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*WHILE WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN,
THEY TEACH US.*

30 Years
Caring for All Children

Workshops of Interest

The ECDC can provide information and workshops on a variety of topics tailored to the interests and needs of parents and early childhood professionals. Resources are available on such topics as general child development, developmental issues for children with special needs, coping strategies, and specific disabilities.

Workshops include:

- **Including All Kids**
- **Making Parent Partnerships**
- **Early Childhood Development: The Meaning of Red Flags**
- **Positive Guidance and Behavior Strategies**
- **Moving On: Children and Families Facing Transition**
- **What Are Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education?**
- **What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?**
- **Getting Ready for Kindergarten**

Who We Are

The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is a regional technical assistance center for the State Education Department providing information, referral and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with young children birth to five. We are located at Syracuse University's Center on Human Policy.

ECDC services to families are free and confidential.

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